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GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

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Office of the PCCF-cum-Secretary

Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management
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NOTIFICATION

Tholung – Kishong Conservation Zonation

WHEREAS, protected areas should be zoned according to values in smaller pockets not necessarily as large cores, but a mosaic of smaller, manageable cores, spread in an area with tempered human use. Other areas for incentive programmes such as community based tourism need to be established. The smaller cores should act as 'source' populations for sustaining populations of endangered species outside.

AND WHEREAS, conservation of the Musk Deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*), Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), alpine birds like Himalayan Monal, Snow Partridge, Blood Pheasant and endangered medicinal plants of the high altitude alpine ecosystem, and their habitat alongwith other flora, fauna and alpine ecosystems in North Sikkim is of utmost importance.

NOW THEREFORE, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (8) of section 35 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (53 of 1972) the State Government hereby notifies the following areas within the Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) for conservation zonation of flagship species:

Flagship species	**Conservation Zonation**
Musk Deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*)	Panch Pokhri (Lungdoh Nay) in Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim by declaration of 27 square kilometer of the Khangchendzonga National Park (1.51% of the total area of KNP) as the Panch Pokhri (Lungdoh Nay) Musk Deer Conservation Zone (PPMDCZ).
Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*)	Dawathong in Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim by declaration of 12 square kilometer of the Khangchendzonga National Park (0.67% of the total area of KNP) as the Dawathong Himalayan Tahr Conservation Zone (DHTCZ)

Alpine birds	Thepa la in Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim by population mostly Himalayan Monal, declaration of 5 square kilometer of the Khangchendzonga Snow Partridge and Blood Pheasant National Park (0.28% of the total area of KNP) as the Thepa la (north east) Alpine Birds Conservation Zone (TABCZ)
Medicinal Plants wild germplasm	Thepa la in Upper Dzongu, North Sikkim by the declaration of 1.4 square kilometer of the Khangchendzonga National Park (0.08% of the total area of KNP) as the Thepa la (south west) Medicinal Plants Conservation Zone (TMPCZ). It envisages the creation of *insitu* field gene banks of inter and intra specific diversity of medicinal plants across the alpine zone of the Eastern Himalayas.

1. Conservation Importance and Values

The steep rocky ridge running north south and separating the watersheds of Rimpi chu in Upper Dzongu and Lachen chu has been traditionally free from grazing by both sheep and yaks. The upper reaches have extensive pristine alpine sedge meadows which offer prime habitat for endangered mountain ungulates, alpine birds and medicinal plants. Highly nutrient *sun buki (Kobresia capillifolia)* formed extensive meadows. Availability of other fodder plants like Ganar *(Heracleum sp.),* Cheeru *(Pleurospermum sp.)* and Khokim *(Rheum acuminatum)* further enrich the value of these meadows. The presence of a number of *urars* (caverns) provides cover from inclement weather for wild ungulates.

This area has a population of Musk Deer and Himalayan Tahr and is also important from the point of view of studying the impacts of pastoralism, since it has a very limited grazing history by domestic livestock. Valuable medicinal plants like Kurki *(Picrorhiza kurrooa),* Bikh *(Aconitum ferox),* Bhutkesh *(Anemone polyanthes)* and Khokim *(Rheum acuminatum)* are also abundantly available.

2. Baseline Habitat Survey during summer of 2006

The local community of Dzongu jointly with The Mountain Institute, Forest Department and the Mutanchi Lom Aal Shezum NGO conducted a habitat survey during July 2006. During this survey the nature trail, camping sites and wildlife critical habitats were identified.

Vegetation sampling was conducted during based on (1 X 1 meter quadrate) sample plots with the sampling stations at Dawathong, Tholpe and Kishong. This alpine landscape in the conservation zone can be categorized as follows:

S. No.	Landscape Property	Value
1	Habitat Type	Tussock forming Sedge Meadow
2	Aspect	South west
2	Biotic Pressure	Very limited history of grazing or collection of medicinal plants traditionally. Status is pristine.
3	% vegetation cover	90 %
4	% cover of palatable plants	80% (dominated by *Sun buki (Kobresia capillifolia))*
5	Species richness (no of species per sample plot of $1m^2$)	11
6	Valuable fodder plants	*Sun buki (Kobresia capillifolia), Bhalu buki (Kobresia duthiei), Rani buki (Festuca vallesiaca), Suire buki (Juncus sp.), Ganer (Heracleum sp.), Kenjo (Rheum nobile) and Harkat (Carex nivalis)*
7	Evidence of key wildlife (direct and indirect evidence)	Musk Deer, Himalayan Tahr, Snow Partridge, Himalayan Monal and Blood Pheasant
8	Valuable medicinal plants	*Kurki (Picrorhiza kurrooa), Bikh (Aconitum ferox), Bhutkesh (Anemone polyanthes)* and *Khokim (Rheum acuminatum)*

These meadows should be given highest conservation importance and kept free from competition from domestic livestock. The group came across four red fox and four himalayan tahr at Upper Dawathong and just after crossing Dawathong pass. We also sighted a musk deer above Nikashe Pokhri in Panch Pokhri area. South east of Thepa la was rich in alpine birds specially snow partridge, blood pheasant and himalayan monal. While after crossing the pass the north western aspect had a pocket of extensive Kurki *(Picrorhiza kurrooa)* meadows.

3. Existing legal status and threats

All the four Conservation Zones fall within the Khangchendzonga National Park which is notified under the Wildlife Protection Act -1972 and Musk Deer, Himalayan Tahr, Himalayan Monal, Snow Partridge and Blood Pheasant are all protected under Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act-1972. The team also detected in one of the caves one sack full of snares (*paaso*) at Thepa-la possibly for hunting musk deer and pheasants. After crossing Thepe la we also came across a decayed makeshift *Bhattis* which the local resource persons inform was used to dry *Kurki* before taking it to the adjoining villages.

4. Boundaries

The boundaries of the four conservation zones is as follows:

Panch Pokhri Musk Deer Conservation Zone (PPMDCZ): Declaring this area within the KNP, with the following borders:

North	Thepa la ridge (is contiguous with the eastern boundary of the Thepa la Medicinal Plants Conservation Zone and the Alpine Birds Conservation Zone
East	4000m contour
South	Follows the 3000 meter contour till it meets the
West	Follows the 4000 meter contour till it meets the Khola Urar stream
Total Area	27 square kilometers (1.51% of the total area of KNP) This conservation area includes the areas around Khola Urar, Surgey Danra, Ghumne, Shyarbey, Chongripaley, Sukey Pokhri, Dhurd, Mool Dhunga, Patey Bhanjyang, and Kasturi Urar.

Dawathong Himalayan Tahr Conservation Zone (DHTCZ): Declaring this area within the KNP, with the following borders:

North	Dawathong Chu
East	Follows the 4000m contour
South	Trekking Trail (is contiguous with the northern boundary of the Alpine Birds Conservation Zone
West	Follows the Dawathong ridge
Total Area	12 square kilometers (0.67% of the total area of KNP) This conservation area includes the areas around Khola Urar, Surgey Danra, Ghumne, Shyarbey, Chongripaley, Sukey Pokhri, Dhurd, Mool Dhunga, Patey Bhanjyang, and Kasturi Urar.

Thepa la Alpine Birds Conservation Zone (TABCZ): Declaring this area within the KNP, with the following borders:

North	Is contiguous with the southern boundary of the Dawathong Himalayan Tahr Conservation Zone
East	Follows the Thepa la river
South	Trekking Trail (is contiguous with the northern boundary of the Alpine Birds Conservation Zone
West	Follows the Thepa la ridge till the pass

Total Area 5 square kilometers (0.28% of the total area of KNP)

This conservation area includes the areas around Khola Urar, Surgey Danra, Ghumne, Shyarbey, Chongripaley, Sukey Pokhri, Dhurd, Mool Dhunga, Patey Bhanjyang, and Kasturi Urar.

Thepa la Medicinal Plants Conservation Zone (TMPCZ): Declaring this area within the KNP, with the following borders:

North Follows the 3500m contour
East Follows the Thepa la ridge
South Follows the Long chu along the river
West Follows the 3500m contour
Total Area 1.4 square kilometers (0.08% of the total area of KNP)

This conservation area includes the areas around Khola Urar, Surgey Danra, Ghumne, Shyarbey, Chongripaley, Sukey Pokhri, Dhurd, Mool Dhunga, Patey Bhanjyang, and Kasturi Urar.

5. Map of the conservation Area

6. Key Issues in the Conservation Management Plan

(A) Conservation Initiatives

(1) Publicity of these regulations by installing adequate signages at Bay, Lingza, Leek, camping sites and the conservation zone.

(2) Informing the travel agents, tour operators, herders, panchayats, pack animal operators, trekking service providers, Himal Rakshaks, JFMC/EDC and NGOs about these regulations.

(3) Capacity building of field staff of forest department, travel agents, herders, pack animal operators, Himal Rakshaks, Panchayats, JFMC/EDC and local NGOs.

(4) Annual census / survey of the population, distribution and status of musk deer, himalayan tahr, alpine birds, medicinal plants and other indicator flora and fauna in this conservation zone shall be conducted.

(5) Encourage focused conservation and recovery programs for the musk deer.

(6) Regular patrolling jointly with the local community, JFMC/EDC and Himal Rakshaks especially during monsoons and winters should be conducted to ascertain instances of poaching and status of other threats and controlling them.

(7) Setting up of a wildlife intelligence network

(8) Involvement of reputed NGOs in wildlife research, conservation and monitoring

(9) These conservation initiatives should be incorporated into the existing schemes and programmes of the Khangchendzonga National Park and Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in order to provide adequate funds for implementation of this zonation and conservation management plan.

(A) Conservation Regulations

(1) Movement of pack animal (horses, dzos and yaks) is prohibited throughout the year.

(2) No camping by tourists within this conservation zone is permitted.

(3) Lighting fire or cooking food is permitted only at the designated campsites.

(A) Legal provisions and penalty

(1) Pack animal (horse, dzo and yak) operators or yak herders who enter into this conservation zone shall be punishable with a fine which shall not be less than five thousand rupees but may extend to ten thousand rupees apart from the compensation for the damage caused. Provided that in case of a subsequent offence the fine shall not be less than ten thousand rupees and may extend to twenty five thousand rupees apart from the compensation for the damage caused and the concerned pack animal operator or yak herder shall be banned from entering in the forest areas of the state for a period of five years.

(2) If tourists or support staff violate the conservation regulations then the concerned travel company organizing the trek or in its absence the group leader of the trekking party (hereinafter referred to as "trek manager") shall be punishable with a fine which shall not be less than five thousand rupees but may extend to ten thousand rupees apart from the compensation for the damage caused. Provided that in case of a subsequent offence the fine shall not be less than ten thousand rupees and may extend to twenty five thousand rupees apart from the compensation for the damage caused and the concerned "trek manager" shall be banned from trekking or organizing trekking in the forest areas of the state for a period of five years.

(3) The compounding officer shall include all forest officers not below the rank of a block officer. The compounding officer may order reward to be paid to a person who renders assistance in the detection of the offence or apprehending the offender out of the sum of money accepted as

fine not exceeding twenty percent of such money. The compounding officer may meet up the expenditure incurred for detecting the offence and apprehending the offender out of the sum of money accepted as fine not exceeding twenty percent of such money.

7. **These rules shall apply in addition to the laws relating to forests, environment, wildlife and biodiversity.**

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